Do they mean you?

Soviet KGB fostered JFK conspiracy theories, b

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WASHINGTON — The Soviet KGB fabricated evidence linking the CIA to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and passed the material to unwitting conspiracy theorists in the United States, according to a new book based on KGB files brought to the West by a defector.

According to the files turned over by a former KGB archivist to British intelligence and detailed in the book, Moscow's Cold War spy service took several steps designed to link the CIA to the Kennedy assassination.

These steps included forging a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald to a CIA officer, E. Howard Hunt, asking for information "before any steps are taken by me or anyone else," according to the book, *The Sword and the Shield*, written by Christopher Andrew and the former KGB archivist, Vasily Mitrokhin. The book is to be published by Basic Books later this month.

The Oswald letter was supposed to have been written about two weeks before Kennedy was shot in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, but was actually created by the KGB in the mid-1970s, after Hunt's name had surfaced in the Watergate investigation, according to KGB files copied by Mitrokhin while he served as a KGB archivist.

U.S. circulation

The letter was then passed anonymously to three conspiracy buffs and entered circulation in the United States when it was picked up by one writer of self-published assassination books, the authors say.

The letter led to a brief flurry of interest when a Dallas newspaper reported that a handwriting expert declared it to be genuine, but a congressional panel that reinvestigated the Kennedy assassination in the late 1970s later concluded that the letter was probably a forgery.

The KGB's clumsy propaganda campaign never had much of an impact on the debate over the Kennedy assassination in the United States. But the archives spirited out of Russia by Mitrokhin appear to support the long-standing assertions by CIA officials that the KGB conducted disinformation campaigns designed to raise dark suspicions about the U.S. government and prominent American leaders around the world.

The archives support CIA claims that the KGB spread disinformation about John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Mitrokhin was a KGB archivist in charge of managing many of the spy service's secret files until he retired in 1984. When he arrived in Britain in 1992 and sought out British intelligence, he brought with him a huge cache of notes that he said he had taken based on those files, and turned them over.

A KGB treasure trove

The Mitrokhin files, which the British considered reliable enough to share with the CIA and FBI, have offered Western intelligence and law enforcement officials a treasure trove of historical information about KGB operations around the world.

Mitrokhin first attempted to defect to the United States, but got a lukewarm reception from a CIA officer when he approached the agency in a Baltic country soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Officials say the CIA's Soviet/East European Division had decided that the KGB was no longer a threat and had instituted a controversial new policy that led CIA officers in the field to turn away many defectors. Paul Redmond, who was then the CIA's deputy chief of counterintelligence, said in an interview that he sought to take over the Mitrokhin case after other officials had failed to show interest, but by then Mitrokhin had turned to the British.

Redmond now argues that the CIA's diffident handling of Mit khin's efforts underscored a lar problem, which was that the C decided "naively" after the c lapse of the Soviet Union to sc back its espionage operatio against Moscow.

The CIA apparently did miss good bet with Mitrokhin, since archives seem to reveal a wi array of intriguing insights in KGB operations against the We Among other things, according the book, the files show that t KGB planted secret caches weapons in Europe and probab in North America as well, appa ently for use in the event of wa

Blackmail attempts

They also appear to show th the KGB sought to blackmail Ge man Chancellor Willy Brandt the 1960s by alleging that he ha spied for Moscow during Wor War II.

While Brandt was living in exi in Sweden during the war, he ha provided information about Ge many to the Soviets as well as t British and Americans, but nev committed espionage, the fil show. But in 1962, the KG attempted to blackmail Brandt t threatening to use evidence of h dealings with the KGB's Stoc